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EURIPIDES'
A L C E S T I S

TRANSLATED BY

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WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

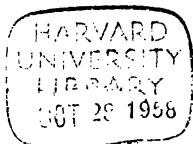
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PREFACE

THE masterpieces of our national classics are now happily subjects of study wherever instruction in the humanities is given. There is probably no good school, public or private, in England in which a play of Shakespeare or a book of the *Faerie Queene* or of *Paradise Lost* is not included in the curriculum, and generally no doubt with the happiest results. In some cases such studies, degenerating into cram-work, may have failed to effect what it was hoped they would effect, but as a rule their record has certainly not been failure. An intelligent appreciation of good literature and a genuine interest in it have been created; liberal curiosity has been awakened, and very many boys and girls annually leave our schools both fitted and anxious to extend their reading and explore for themselves the authors to whom they have been introduced. All this has been the result of the salutary reforms of the last fifteen or twenty years.

Up to the present time the chief, and indeed in most schools the only, medium of literary as distinguished from linguistic teaching has been

our own literature; and that our own literature should be the chief medium for such instruction is, for obvious reasons, both natural and desirable. But is it not equally desirable that the sphere of such instruction should now be extended, especially if it can be shown that by such an extension the students of our own and of modern literature generally would be gainers, and that such an extension would be practicable? Of this we may be quite sure, that a boy or girl who can be interested in a play of Shakespeare, will, if placed in a position to understand it, be equally interested in a judiciously selected play of one of the Attic masters, nay, would probably find more attraction in such epics as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* than in the *Faerie Queene* and in *Paradise Lost*.

When we remember the educational value from a moral and sentimental point of view, the deep interest and attractiveness on the human and dramatic side, and above all the historical importance, in the fullest sense of the term, of the Greek masterpieces, can there be two opinions about the desirableness of including them in all our school courses of liberal studies? So essentially, indeed, does the influence of the mythology and poetry of ancient Greece penetrate our own classical literature, verse and prose alike, that a reader who has no ac-

quaintance with them is not only unable critically to understand either its evolution and characteristics, but is perpetually at a loss to understand its commonest references and allusions. He is arrested at every step. No one, surely, could question that some acquaintance with that mythology and poetry is as indispensable to an intelligent study of our national classics from Chaucer to Tennyson, as the letters of the alphabet are to a written sentence. Of all intelligent literary study the basis must rest on some acquaintance with Greek tradition : turn where we will it confronts us ; its presence, particularly in our poetry, is simply ubiquitous. And to say that at least an introduction to it should be regarded as part of the equipment of every decently educated boy and girl, even of the Board School or High School grade, is to say what probably few educationists would dispute. This information could be easily, as well as most pleasantly, imparted. The prescription of even a single Greek play or a book or two of Homer in translation would, with appropriate commentary by a competent teacher, go a long way towards supplying it. Even where the original is taught such translations, if prescribed as collateral studies, could scarcely fail to lighten and vivify the drudgery necessarily involved,

particularly at the earlier stages, in acquiring so difficult a language as ancient Greek.

Nor surely is there any reason why translations of the chief Greek masterpieces, when such translations are of themselves of classical excellence, should not, if properly introduced and annotated, be admitted side by side with the dramas of Shakespeare as textbooks in our courses of school study. Instead of a student being expected to offer two plays of Shakespeare for examination why, it may be asked, should he not substitute for one of these plays a Greek play in approved translation?

But it is not in schools and educational institutions only that such an introduction to the study of the only drama and epic which rival our own would be appropriate. To the general reader and to the vast number of literary students whose studies are guided by the University Extension lectures and the National Home Reading Union it would, I venture to think, be equally appropriate. It is for these reasons, with this object, and with the hope also that such a scheme may find favour with those who direct and regulate secondary and popular education, that the present volume has been prepared; should it prove to be acceptable it is proposed to follow it with others.

INTRODUCTION

I

LIFE OF EURIPIDES

OF the details of the life of Euripides, the youngest of the great trio of Athenian tragic dramatists, very little is certainly known, and that little has been perplexed by conflicting statements, by palpably absurd fables, and by the slanderous fictions of the comic poet Aristophanes, who pursued him during many years with rancorous and unscrupulous hostility. According to one tradition he was born on the very day of the famous battle of Salamis, Sept. 23, B.C. 480, on the island itself, whither his parents with other terrified refugees had fled from Athens when Athens was taken by the Persians. Other traditions assign his birth to the preceding year; others, again, place it as far back as B.C. 485. His father, whose name was Mnesarchus, was an Athenian of the demus or parish of Phlya in the Cecropid tribe, or, as others relate, of Phyle in the tribe of Oeneis, and was, it is said, engaged in trade. Of his mother nothing more is certainly known than that her name was Cleito and that she was or had been a herb-seller. His parents, in spite of the assertions

of Aristophanes to the contrary, were probably highly respectable and well-to-do. Certain it is that he received instruction in rhetoric from one of the most fashionable and expensive teachers in Athens, the Sophist Prodicus, and, according to one tradition, discharged, when a boy, a public function, that of cup-bearer at the Thargelian festival, which was only entrusted to boys of noble blood. As a youth he gained great distinction in gymnastics, winning the prize both at the Eleusinian and Thesean contests, and even offering himself before he had completed his eighteenth year as a candidate at the Olympian Games. In early manhood he is said to have devoted himself to the art of painting, and with some success. But this he soon abandoned for literature and philosophy. These pursuits brought him into intimacy with contemporaries whose influence may be traced very clearly in his dramas, namely, the natural philosopher Anaxagoras, from whom he probably derived his sympathy with advanced rationalism; his old tutor Prodicus, from whom and from whose school he seems to have derived what may be called the sophistical element—and it is an all-pervading one in his plays,—his delight, that is to say, in disputation and argument and in the employment of all the tricks and devices of rhetoric and dialectic; Protagoras, in whose ethics and metaphysics there must have been much to attract him; and lastly, Socrates,

who, though some twelve years his junior, assisted him, we are told, in the composition of his dramas, and undoubtedly exercised great influence on him.

All these men were reformers and in active revolt, at war with the old superstitions, at war with conventional establishment. Serious and enlightened men, they were endeavouring by an appeal to reason and science to reconstruct on an ethical basis the national religion, and, branded by the conservatives as free-thinkers and atheists for their pains, were socially in pretty much the same position as Paine, Godwin, and Shelley were in the England of the early nineteenth century. It was with them and their partisans that Euripides cast in his lot, and there can be little doubt that when he betook himself to dramatic composition he did it with the intention of making the drama a vehicle for the dissemination of the doctrines and propaganda with which he was in full and enthusiastic sympathy.¹ In this we have the key not only to what differentiates his work as a dramatist from that of the two

¹ It is surely probable that the Plays of Euripides as they were produced on the stage and as they were circulated afterwards in MS. for private reading presented a very different text. It is scarcely within the bounds of possibility that the most daring utterances in them on the subject of the national religion could have been pronounced on the stage.

masters who stand on each side of him, Aeschylus and Sophocles, but to what is recorded of his life and fortunes as a man. In the dim and uncertain details of his biography it is at least clear that prejudice and scandal have been everywhere busy in detraction, and that at Athens, at least during his lifetime, he was exceedingly unpopular. Thus, according to one tradition, though he wrote seventy-five plays, he only gained the first prize five times, while another, assigning to him ninety-two plays, represents him as successful with fifteen only. Of the great disproportion between the number of plays produced by him and the number of prizes obtained by him there can be no doubt. Scandal was busy both with his private and domestic life. Thus his many bitter reflections on women are said to have originated partly from his own profligacy and partly from his experience as a husband, both his first wife Choerilla, and his second wife Melitto, being unfaithful to him. All that is known about his temper and character refutes the first, and all that in the second can be submitted to proof involves so many inconsistencies and improbabilities that it may be safely dismissed as groundless calumny.

At what time he began to write for the stage is not known, but the first play acted in his name was the *Peliades* (Daughters of Pelias), produced in B.C. 455. In B.C. 441 he gained for the first time the first prize, but with what tetralogy (the

Greek dramatists always competed with three tragedies and what was called a Satyric play, which collectively had the name of a tetralogy) is not known. In B.C. 438 he produced the earliest of his extant plays, the *Alcestis*; in B.C. 431 the *Medea*; in or about B.C. 429 the *Hippolytus*, a recast of a former drama on the same subject entitled the *Veiled Hippolytus*, and with this play he again won the first prize. These masterpieces were succeeded in B.C. 425 by one of the most powerful and pathetic of his tragedies, the *Hecuba*. Between B.C. 425 and B.C. 420 appeared the *Andromache*, *Ion*, a superb effort of his genius, the *Suppliants*, and the *Heracleidae* (Children of Hercules). To some date between B.C. 420 and 417 belongs *The Raging Hercules*, a singularly powerful but somewhat melodramatic tragedy, a great part of which Browning has translated in his *Aristophanes' Apology*, and about this time he probably produced the *Iphigenia in Tauris*. To B.C. 415, 412, 411 are to be assigned respectively the *Troades* (Trojan Women), *Helena*, and *Phoenissae* (Phoenician Maidens). In or about 410 appeared the *Electra* and in 408 the *Orestes*. Shortly after the production of the last play he left Athens either to visit, or in accordance with an invitation to reside permanently at the Court of Archelaus, king of Macedonia. With his motives for taking this step scandals, with which we need not concern ourselves, were again busy. The probability is that finding himself

exceedingly unpopular with his fellow citizens at Athens and harassed with the unceasing attacks and calumnies of Aristophanes and the Comic Poets, and perhaps not insensible of the comfort and honour awaiting him at a court as splendid as it was opulent and hospitable, he was glad of such a haven. Athens at that time, groaning as she was under all the calamities entailed on her by the terrible disaster in Sicily, and torn by the miserable factions rampant among her citizens, could not have been a very desirable residence for a man now far advanced in years. In all probability it was not his intention to quit her, ungrateful though she had been, for ever.

One noble drama, inspired no doubt by the scenery and associations of Macedonia, he composed for his royal host and patron—the *Bacchae* (Female Bacchants). And it is not a little significant that in this, in all probability his last work, he took occasion to proclaim his return to orthodoxy and his belief in the wisdom of conservatism in all that relates to formal religion. Doubts have recently been cast on this view of the play, but surely on very insufficient grounds.

Euripides was not destined to see Athens again. He died at Pella in Macedonia in or about B.C. 406. That he was torn to pieces by dogs is probably a fiction suggested perhaps by the fate of Pentheus torn to pieces by the Bacchants in his last tragedy; that the dogs were urged on

him by women while he was engaged in a criminal intrigue and to avenge his sarcasms and aspersions on their sex is palpable fiction. On the news of his death arriving at Athens a petition was sent to Archelaus requesting that the remains of the poet might be sent home for interment among his countrymen. But the request was refused, and they were buried with great honour in Macedonia. His brother poet Sophocles, who was so soon to follow him, gave public and emphatic expression to his grief and respect by ordering the actors in a play which he was about to produce on the stage to appear uncrowned. Not long after his death the Athenians honoured the memory of their exiled poet by erecting a cenotaph on the road from the Peiraeus to the city, bearing an inscription written either by Thucydides, the eminent historian, or by the musician Timotheus. It may be given in Paley's version :—

To Hellas' Bard all Hellas gives a tomb ;
On Macedon's far shores his relics sleep.
Athens, the pride of Greece, was erst his home,
Whom now all praise, and all in common weep.

We learn from Pausanias that a statue was also erected to him in the Theatre. After the poet's death three plays from his pen, the *Alcmaeon*, the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and the *Bacchae*, the two latter being extant, were brought out by the younger Euripides, possibly the son, more probably the

nephew, of the dramatist, and performed at the Great Dionysia in, or just after, B.C. 405. The *Bacchae* had been completed but the others appear to have been incomplete.

Of the person of Euripides no detailed account has come down to us, so that we do not know how far the extant busts of him are authentic likenesses; all we know is a trifle, namely, that he wore a thick beard and had freckles on his face. He left three sons—Mnesarchides, the eldest, who became a merchant; Mnesilochus, who became an actor; and one who bore his name, and may have been the Euripides responsible for the production of the posthumous drama.

Like his brother poets Aeschylus and Sophocles, Euripides was a voluminous composer. The number of dramas written by him has been variously estimated: the most trustworthy traditions ascribe to him ninety-two dramas in all, namely, eighty-four tragedies and eight satyr plays, but out of these deduce sixteen as doubtful or ungenuine, leaving him seventy-six. Of these eighteen are extant, and on the genuineness of one of them, the *Rhesus*, much doubt has—perhaps without sufficient reason—been cast.

In temper and character Euripides appears to have been serious, and, if not exactly morose, austere, averse to mirth, melancholy, and somewhat ungenial. He was fond of solitude, and is said to have been in the habit of retiring to

a solitary cave on the sea-coast that he might meditate and compose. If he was a misogynist, as might be deduced with some plausibility from scattered passages and aphorisms in his writings—just as the same peculiarity might by a similar process be deduced with equal plausibility from the writings of Hesiod, Simonides of Amorgus, Theognis Archilochus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Menander, and Philemon—we can only express our surprise that he could have drawn such noble and beautiful characters, as Alcestis, Polyxena, Electra, Iphigenia, Macaria, Evadne, Andromache, Antigone, and Theonoe. If he was a libertine, which is in the highest degree improbable, he must, as a moralist, have been a consummate hypocrite, for with the exception of Milton and Dante no great poet has so eloquently eulogized chastity or dwelt more emphatically on the danger, folly, and evil involved, or possibly involved, in impurity and profligacy. That his austere and ungenial demeanour concealed a most humane and tender heart, an *anima naturaliter Christiana*, as Tertullian says of Seneca, is apparent in almost every drama he has left. It is seen in his sensitive sympathy with every form of distress and suffering, and with all that in our common humanity appeals for pity and protection; in the fondness with which he dwells on the innocence and helplessness of young children, on the virtues of slaves and menials, and on the claims such virtues have on our

gratitude; in his noble and moving pictures of what the gentler affections can inspire and achieve, in the fervour of his denunciations of cruelty and oppression, and in his dislike of war, which is not a note in the poetry of his time.

Though Euripides was not popular at Athens during his lifetime, for the reasons which have been stated, his popularity elsewhere was unbounded. Plutarch tells us how on one occasion certain Athenians being pursued by pirates and seeking refuge in a Caunian harbour were at first repulsed, but on it being discovered that some of the crew could repeat passages from Euripides were at once admitted and hospitably entertained. And he also relates that many of the Athenian prisoners after the terrible rout and destruction of the Athenian navy and army in Sicily between B.C. 413 and 412 regained their liberty by reciting his verses to their masters. The affection indeed and admiration with which he was regarded by many of his countrymen is very strikingly illustrated by the Comic poet Philemon, who makes one of his characters say 'I would hang myself, to see Euripides'.

And this is not at all surprising. He is not so great a poet as Aeschylus and he is not so great a poet as Sophocles, but he comes more home to us as human beings, he touches our affections more nearly than they do. Many harsh things have been said of him by critics both in ancient

and modern times. He is said to have degraded tragedy because he substituted for the august and stately personages, the Gods and Goddesses, the demi-gods and heroes who filled the tragic stage before him, what were practically ordinary men and women, and because he substituted for the idealism, religious orthodoxy, and high moral aim of preceding tragedy, truth to life and nature, free-thinking, and sensational appeals to the emotions and passions.

All this he undoubtedly did, and therefore both for this and for other reasons which it is not necessary to specify here, it must be acknowledged that he stands on a much lower level, both as an artist and a moralist, than they do. Many, however, of his admirers would not allow the statement that as a moralist he is to be placed below Aeschylus and Sophocles to pass unchallenged. They would contend that his heterodoxy with respect to the popular theology, to which he was always fanatically opposed, originated from his consciousness that not only could it not be reconciled with any intelligible principles of morality, but was absolutely incompatible with them; that it was precisely because he was a moralist and in the service of morality that he was an unbeliever and an iconoclast. To this it may be answered that neither Aeschylus nor Sophocles had any difficulty in reconciling the symbolism of the popular creed with the principles of morality and

thus establishing morality on a divine basis. Euripides, on the other hand, ignoring such symbolism, severed morality from divinity, and substituted the tests of pure and naked rationalism. Wherever this is its basis in the mind of a poet its principles are seldom consistent and always more or less fluctuating and infirm; and as it has no association for him with imagination and sentiment he is always in danger of subordinating it to sensuous and sensational effects. And this is the case with Euripides.

It is not only to average humanity that Euripides appeals, but he appeals to it on all sides, and he appeals to it in what most concerns and interests it. What Bacon said of his essays, that 'they came home to men's interests and bosoms', may be applied with strict propriety to his dramas. To begin with, they are a mine of practical wisdom, of aphorisms, reflections, and generalizations bearing on almost everything pertaining to human life. No poet, with the single exception of Shakespeare, is so quotable or so often on the lips of his readers. His extant dramas, and still more perhaps the fragments of those which have perished, show with what sleepless and catholic curiosity, with what sympathy, with what insight, he had studied humanity and all that is of concern to it. Nothing seems to escape him: on theology and metaphysics, on ethics, on natural philosophy, on politics, on economics, on every

relation into which the affections can enter—love, marriage, the ties of kindred, friendship, on all the trials and accidents to which such affections and relations are exposed, on every form which suffering and calamity, discomfort and perplexity, can assume, whether physical or mental, whether originating from without or self-generated from within—on all these subjects he has something illuminating or solacing to say. Hence to a thoughtful man no poet is so delightful a companion.

As a master of pathos he has no equal, he has scarcely a second, if we except Homer, among the poets of his nation, and certainly no superior in the literature of the world. His pathos is indeed, in its simple piercing appeal to the affections and sympathies, at times almost overwhelming. For proof of this we need go no further than the parting of Polyxena and her mother in the *Hecuba*, the lament of Iphis over Evadne in the *Suppliants*, of Andromache over Astyanax in the *Women of Troy*, while the appeal of Iphigenia to her father in the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the last speech of Macaria in the *Children of Hercules*, the death of Hippolytus in the drama named from him, and the farewell of Alcestis to her husband and children in the play here translated, if less agitating in their emphasis of passion touch the very heart-strings of pity and compassion. It was this which made Mrs. Browning say of him, in verses prefixed by Browning as a motto

to his noble paraphrase and adaptation of the *Alcestis* :—

Our Euripides the human,
With his droppings of warm tears.

Not less impressive and masterly is his delineation of the darker passions of revenge, jealousy, and hatred, and of those still more terrible scourges of our suffering nature—infatuation, insanity, and frenzy. Such studies we have in the *Hecuba*, the *Medea*, the *Hippolytus*, the *Raging Hercules*, and the *Bacchae*—all of them masterpieces, if not in the highest sense of the term, at least in the thrilling effectiveness of the impression made by them on the emotions and passions, in their truth to nature, in the absorbing interest of their plots, in the sensuous charm of their exquisite lyrics, and in their wealth of aphorism and collateral commentary on life.

In many respects he may be said to have anticipated our own Elizabethan drama. Such plots as those of the *Ion*, the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the *Andromache*, and the *Helena* have all the interest and many of the characteristics of the tragi-comedies of Fletcher. The *Electra*, particularly the opening portions of it, is a transcript from life as real and as vivid as anything in Dekker or Heywood.

But in nothing does he come so nearly home to the modern world as in his studies and presentation of women. In Shakespeare and in

Shakespeare alone have we a gallery of female portraits comparable in range and elaboration to what he has left us. He has painted them under almost all conditions which can elicit and develop the expression of natural character: under the infatuation of illicit and consuming passion at war with the better self, as in *Phaedra*; under the provocation of such wrongs and outrages as transform *Medea* into a tigress and *Hecuba* into a fiend; under all that appeals to their proper heroism, the spirit of self-sacrifice and self-abnegating devotion, as in *Macaria*, *Evadne*, *Polyxena*, *Iphigenia*, and *Alcestis*. And if in *Alcestis* he has given us the ideal wife, in *Electra* and *Antigone* he has given us the ideal sister and the ideal daughter. Nothing could be more touching and more beautiful than the scene in the *Orestes* where *Electra* is tenderly nursing her stricken brother, or the scene in the *Phoenician Maidens* where *Antigone* is comforting her aged and sorrow-broken father.

Nor must we forget what an English reader can only partly appreciate, though even in translation it cannot but be more or less discernible—the exquisite beauty of the lyrics of Euripides. In charm they exceed all that has come down to us from antiquity.

And so it has come to pass that this dramatist shares with Homer, with Virgil, and with Horace, the great and most enviable distinction of living not

only on the lips but in the hearts and affections of men. Critics may insist on his immense inferiority in many very important respects to Aeschylus and Sophocles, may make havoc of his dramas as works of art, may declaim against his bad taste, his vulgarity and clap-trap, his frigid sophistry and tedious rhetoric, his irreligion, his offences against the becoming—and yet the general verdict will be what Porson expressed when instituting a parallel between Euripides and Sophocles: ‘We approve Sophocles more than Euripides, but we love Euripides more than Sophocles; Sophocles we praise, but Euripides we love.’ He was, it may be added,—and how significant is such a fact—the favourite poet of Milton, of Browning, of Froude, and of Cardinal Newman.

II

CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THE *ALCESTIS* WAS
PRODUCED

The *Alcestis*, the earliest of the extant plays of Euripides, was brought out in B.C. 439, in the Archonship of Glaucinus. The Greek dramas were not produced like our own as independent works or for private theatres. They were produced in competition for public prizes and for exhibition in the great state-supported theatre known as the Theatre of Dionysus. Three prizes were offered, and each competitor was required to compete with three tragedies, together with what was called a Satyric

play: the three tragedies were designated a trilogy, and they might form a sequence, as they do in the *Agamemnon*, the *Choephoroe*, and the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, or they might be on independent subjects, as they commonly were with Sophocles and Euripides. The Satyric play, so named from the Satyrs, the traditional attendants on Bacchus, was a farce or burlesque introduced for the purpose of relieving the feelings of the spectators after the strain imposed on them by so much preceding seriousness. Collectively the three tragedies and the farce were known as a tetralogy. The names of the plays with which Euripides competed—his rival was Sophocles, who won the first prize—in B.C. 439, have been preserved, and it is both significant and remarkable that in his tetralogy the *Alcestis* took the place of the Satyric play. This no doubt accounts for its characteristics—its brevity, the grotesque indecency of the scene between Admetus and Pheres, the coarse buffoonery of Hercules, its happy ending, and the somewhat indelicate mystification preceding that ending—for so much in it which savours of comedy and farce, and is so strangely out of keeping with the beautiful and pathetic parts. In reading and judging the play it is necessary to remember this; otherwise we might do the poet injustice by expecting from him, what the circumstances under which the drama was produced necessarily precluded him from giving us, a work of sustained seriousness and dignity.

III

THE STORY OF THE PLAY

The God Aesculapius, or in the Greek form of the name Asclepius, was a son of Apollo, and, endowed by his father, became the god of medicine and the art of healing. Having had the presumption to raise a man from the dead, Zeus slew him with a thunderbolt forged by the Cyclops. Whereupon his father Apollo, enraged with the Cyclops for being instrumental in bringing about the death of his son, slew them. For this he was condemned to descend from Heaven, lay his godhead aside, and serve for an appointed time a mortal man. The mortal man assigned to be his master was Admetus, the son of Pheres, king of Pherae in Thessaly, and at that time occupying his father's throne. Him Apollo duly served as serf and herdsman for the appointed time; and when he left Admetus he left him with kindly feelings, for he had found him a just and good man, and he had been treated with all the respect due to a god. Some time after this Admetus married Alcestis, the daughter of Pelias, king of Iolcus. Having had the misfortune to offend the goddess Artemis on the day of his marriage, he was doomed to die. And now Apollo, grateful for the way Admetus had treated him in the past, came to his assistance. He reconciled him with Artemis, and

though he could not deprive the Fates of a promised victim, he got them to consent to this—that if Admetus could induce some other mortal to die instead of him, that life should be accepted in lieu of his own. Some years passed by in happy wedlock with Alcestis, but at last the appointed day of doom arrived. He had prayed his father, who was well stricken in years, and in the natural course of things nearing the end of life, to die for him, and the old man had refused; so also had his mother. There was only one who would give up life for him, and that was his wife Alcestis and the mother of his children. She had consented to make the sacrifice, and he, in spite of the grief which wrung him, had accepted it. Death, accordingly, is on his way to claim his victim; and is about, for that purpose, to enter the palace. At this point the play opens.

Perhaps no work of art could grate more harshly on the instincts and sentiments of a reader or spectator who approaches it from a modern point of view than this drama. But it is from a Greek point of view that we must approach it if we would properly appreciate it. To the Greek there would be nothing contemptible or unnatural in the conduct of Admetus. By him Alcestis would be considered fortunate for having had an opportunity of displaying so conspicuously her fidelity to a wife's first and capital duty. As to lay down his life for his country was the glory of a man, so to lay down

her life for her husband would be the glory of a wife. Had Admetus prevented such a sacrifice he would have robbed Alcestis of an honour which every nobly-ambitious woman in Hellas would have coveted. This is so much taken for granted by the poet that all that he lays stress on in the drama is the virtue rewarded by the return of Alcestis to life, the virtue characterizing Admetus—the virtue of hospitality: to this duty Admetus, in all the agony of his sorrow, had been nobly true, and as a reward for what he had thus earned the wife who had been equally true to woman's obligations was restored all-glorified to home and children and mutual love. Browning's modification of the character of Admetus in *Balaustion*, namely, the substitution of a higher motive in desiring to live, and in representing his consent to do so as a much greater act of self-sacrifice than his consent to die would have been, is needed no doubt to justify his conduct in the eyes of modern readers, but it would not be needed for its justification in the eyes of an ancient Greek. The other characteristics of the drama are, as has been already pointed out, to be explained by remembering for what part in the tetralogy it was substituted, namely, for the Satyric play.

IV

STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

The Greek tragedies are, in many important respects, very unlike ours. They consist of two parts: the lyric part, which is represented by the Chorus, or what are technically known as 'Kommoi' or lyrical dialogues between the Chorus and one of the actors or between several members of the Chorus itself, and the dialogue. The chorus-part was composed in various lyrical measures and was accompanied with music; the dialogue portion was, as a rule, written in a form of verse known as the iambic trimeter, a form of verse answering very nearly to our blank verse, though one foot longer. The Chorus, consisting of companies of men or women in numbers at first varying but at last fixed at fifteen, had two functions, (*a*) to comment on the action and draw morals from it, and (*b*) to express sympathy with the actors, but in Euripides it is often introduced simply to vary the action with musical interludes, having sometimes little or no pertinence to it. As great importance was attached to the choric or musical portion, which always filled a considerable space, these tragedies had the blended effect of drama and opera. Unlike our Shakespearean drama, they were ideal not realistic presentations of life, and this was symbolized and aided by the way in which

they were put on the stage, the actors having their height and bulk very considerably increased by artificial means, and wearing large masks with apertures for the eyes and mouth, everything contributing to produce a grave, stately, and harmonious effect. The plot was constructed in accordance with what is known as the three unities, the unities of place, time, and action, the first of which is hardly ever, the second very seldom, and the third never, except perhaps occasionally by Euripides, violated. The first requires that the scene should not change, and this, together with the necessity for the Chorus remaining stationary, involves another peculiarity, namely, that the catastrophe does not as a rule take place on the stage, but is related by a messenger. The unity of time requires that what takes place in the drama should be comprised within a few hours, or at most within a revolution of the sun. The unity of action, which is the most important, secures symmetry and harmony, both with respect to structure and with respect to the effect of the play as a whole—what may be called unity of impression. Thus not only would a double plot be unallowable, but no scene, no incident, must be irrelevant, all must be in proportion, all must conduce directly to the catastrophe. The effect of the whole must be grave, impressive, and finally tranquillizing, and that this end may be obtained what is proper to comedy must not be admitted.

The drama must have a moral object, and that moral object is by legitimately exciting the passions of pity and fear to temper and moderate them.

It has been already explained that in the *Alcestis* we have not an illustration of Greek tragedy in its purely typical form, any more than we have in any of the dramas particularly characteristic of Euripides. But for all that, most of its important canons are observed, the most remarkable variation from those canons being the introduction of Comedy.

Its structure is the typical structure of Greek tragedy with one peculiarity: it is customary with Euripides to introduce his plays with a monologue placed in the mouth of one of the *dramatis personae*, explaining the plot and the position of affairs when the action opens, as Apollo does here. Greek tragedy is not like ours divided into acts and scenes, though what are known as the *stasima* mark the portions roughly corresponding to acts. The opening of the play—indeed all that portion of it preceding the entrance of the Chorus—is called the *prolōgōs*; the first song of the Chorus is called the *parōdōs*, the word meaning a side entrance, and so called because the Chorus sang it as they came in from the side to range themselves in the orchestra round the central altar or 'thymêlê'. The part of the dialogue intervening between the *parōdōs* and the next Chorus is known as the first *episōdiōn*, the next Chorus is called the first

stasimōn, so called because the Chorus had taken their stand at the thymele. *Stasima* and *epeisōdiā* then alternate till the last *epeisōdiōn* is reached, and that is called the *exōdōs* because at its conclusion all leave the stage. The choruses themselves, except when very short, were arranged in strophe, that is, the portion sung while the Chorus was moving from left to right, and in antistrophe, the portion sung while it was executing a reverse movement to the left. Occasionally an *epōdē*, that is, an after-song, concludes the choral ode.

SCHEME OF THE PLAY

	LINES
Prologos	1-74
Parodos	75-122
Epeisodion I	123-405
Stasimon I	406-443
Epeisodion II	444-534
Stasimon II	535-558
Epeisodion III	559-912
Stasimon III	913-936
Exodos	937-1091

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

APOLLO.

DEATH.

ADMETUS, *son of Pheres, King of Pherae.*

PERES.

HERCULES.

A Servant of Admetus.

EUMELUS, *one of Admetus' children.*

ALCESTIS, *wife of Admetus.*

A maid, attendant on Alcestis.

CHORUS *of citizens of Pherae.*

THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES

[SCENE. *The precincts of the palace of Admetus at Pherae in Thessaly, with the palace in the background. Apollo enters from the interior.*]

PROLOGUE

Apollo. House of Admetus, erst within thy halls
Did I, a God, endure the fare of slaves ;
For Zeus had killed Asclepius my son—
Smitten his heart with flaming thunder-blast :
Whereat incensed I slew the Cyclops crew,
Forgers of Heaven's bolts. To atone for this
My Father bound me serf to mortal lord.
Thus came I here to tend a stranger's herds
And be the constant guardian of his home.
A holy man, to match my holiness, 10
Was Pheres' son : from death I rescued him,
Tricking the Fates. This boon they granted me—
To save Admetus from impending doom,
If by exchange of life he would provide
Some other victim for the nether Gods.
But, testing all the circle of his friends,
Her too who bare him, and his aged sire,
None found he willing in his stead to die
And leave the light of Heaven, save his wife.
She now within upheld in friendly arms 20
Scarce draws a gasping breath : her doom is sealed
This very day to pass from life to death :
And I must leave this mansion's friendly roof
Lest its pollution touch me—Lo ! e'en now
I see Death stalking near, a ghastly priest,
Suiting his coming to th' appointed day,
To guide his victim to the under-world,

Enter Death.

What dost thou, Phoebus, meddling here
 With pow'rs below to interfere
 And limit their prerogative? 30
 Art not content that thou didst thwart
 The Fates' decree with treach'rous art
 So that Admetus still might live,
 But guardest, armed with bow, the wife
 Who to save him lays down her life?

- A. Fear not—I deal with justice and fair words.
 D. What need of bow then, if thy cause be just?
 A. 'Tis but my custom thus to carry it.
 D. Aye—and to help this house by means unfair.
 A. 'Tis a dear friend's distress that burdens me. 40
 D. Wilt thou then rob me of a second prey?
 A. I never forced thee to let go the first.
 D. How then is he on earth, and not beneath?
 A. By substituting her whom thou would'st fetch.
 D. Drag her away I will, beneath the earth.
 A. So be it—to persuade thee I am weak—
 D. To slay a doomed one?—that my office is.
 A. Nay, to take those whose age is ripe for death.
 D. Now is thy meaning clear—thy purpose plain.
 A. Canst thou not spare Alcestis till old age? 50
 D. No, for I too have privilege to guard.
 A. But one life only hast thou right to take.
 D. The younger life I take, the greater prize.
 A. Yet e'en when old she'll have a costly grave.
 D. Thou ord'rest things in favour of the rich.
 A. Indeed? I knew not thou wert sophist too.
 D. Only the rich could purchase length of life.
 A. Then thou wilt not consent to grant this boon?
 D. I will not. What my nature is thou knowest.
 A. Yes, hostile to mankind, and loathed by Gods. 60

- D. Thou must forgo what ought not to be thine.
 A. Thy savage will, I swear, perforce must yield,
 So strong a champion to this house will come,
 Sent by Eurystheus to bring back the team
 Of Diomed's mares from wintry plains of Thrace.
 He in Admetus' palace entertained
 Will free this lady from thy hand by force :
 No thanks from us thou'lt merit, but thy prey
 Thou wilt surrender, and by me be loathed.
 D. Too many words, and nothing to be gained— 70
 To Hades' mansion she must hence away.
 I go prepared for the initial rite ;
 For whosoever locks this steel shall shear,
 That soul is sacred to the nether Gods.
 [*Exeunt Apollo and Death.*]

Enter Chorus.

(*Parodos.*)

'Tis silence all—no voice I hear
 Within the house—no friend is near
 With tidings of our Queen :
 Must we lament her passed away,
 Or sees she yet the light of day—
 Alcestis, who all men would say 80
 The best of wives has been ?

Semi-chorus (strophe).

Is there no wail that echoes around ?
 Is there of beaten breasts no sound ?
 For accomplished doom no cry ?
 Nowhere about the Palace gate
 Stately attendant mourners wait.
 Come o'er the troubled waves of Fate,
 O healer of woes draw nigh !

.

Semi-chorus (antistrophe).

No one yet to the threshold brings
 Lustral water from cleansing springs, 90
 As the ancient use demands.
 Nor has a votive lock of hair,
 Shorn for the dead, been offered there :
 Hear we no knocking of bosoms bare
 By taboring maidens' hands.

Semi-chorus (strophe).

Vain were it now to sail
 To Lycia's fane divine—
 No offering would prevail
 At Ammon's parched shrine,
 The doomed one to set free : 100
 Abrupt is Fate's decree.
 I know not, in despair,
 Whither I may repair
 With sacrifice and prayer.

Semi-chorus (antistrophe).

Once Phoebus' son could raise
 Unto new life the dead,
 Before Zeus' lightning blaze
 Smote blasting on his head :
 Could he have life to-day,
 He'd find for her a way 110
 From Hades' murky reign
 Released to live again :—
 But now all hope is vain.

Chorus. Nought our King has left untried—
 Altars all with blood are dyed,
 Blood of victims in full tale—
 Yet to heal our woes all fail.

But see—from out the doors comes forth in tears
One of her maidens : with what tidings charged?
Well may we mourn when on our master falls 120
Bereavement, but we yearn the truth to hear—

[Enter attendant maiden.

Lives yet our lady, or has ceased to live?

Attendant. My tidings these—she lives and yet is
dead.

Chor. How can that be, to die and yet to live?

Att. At the last gasp she bows her drooping head.

Chor. Ah, wretched man! a noble pair are parted.

Att. Full knowledge of his loss is still to come.

Chor. Is there no hope her life may yet be spared?

Att. Nay—overpow'ring is the day of doom.

Chor. Is all that fits th' occasion then in train? 130

Att. Aye—robes are there, for laying in her tomb.

Chor. In sooth, a worthy name she leaves on earth,
Noblest by far of women 'neath the Sun.

Att. Noblest indeed—that truth can none gainsay :

What must that woman be whose nobleness

Surpasses hers? how could devoted love

Be better proved than by consent to die

In husband's stead? So much is public talk ;

Her private acts now with amazement hear. 139

When first she knew th' appointed day had come,

With running water her fair limbs she bathed,

Then from the cedar press brought forth a robe

And with its brave adornment draped her form :

So stood in front of the hearth-altar praying—

'Hear, Goddess, this thy suppliant's latest prayer

Ere her departure to the under-world :—

Watch o'er my orphans : grant to both a life

Of wedded honour and devoted love :

Let not these children like their mother perish

By fate untimely ; but with happy lot 150
 Fulfil in native land their term of years.'
 Thus all the altars in the Palace courts
 With prayer and suppliant wreath she visited,
 Plucking for each a myrtle bough : sans tears,
 Sans groans she plucked them, nor did imminent
 doom

The wouted favour of her fair cheek pale :
 Then to her marriage-chamber hurrying,
 Ah ! there at last with streaming eyes she cried—
 'O scene of my first wedded joy, farewell !
 Thou gavest me to him for whom I die : 160
 Farewell ! I hate thee not, for I alone
 Am sacrificed, though loth to part from thee
 And from my husband. Some new wife, perchance
 More fortunate—more chaste she could not be—
 Will claim thee.' Thus she spake, and kneeling
 kissed

And with o'erflowing tears bedewed the couch ;
 Then, having wept full measure, tore herself
 Swooning away ; yet as she went she turned
 Once and again yearning, and on the couch 169
 Cast herself prostrate. Came her children then
 Weeping and clinging to their mother's robe,
 While she embraced them nestling in her arms
 In turn with last fond kisses ere her death.
 And all the household with compassion wept
 For their sweet mistress. She to each held out
 A friendly hand : none was too humble then
 Familiar converse with her to exchange.

Such are the sorrows of Admetus' house :
 Better have died himself, than thus survive
 Haunted by grief which he can ne'er forget. 180

Chor. Say, does Admetus mourn this cruel fate,

To be bereavèd of a loving spouse?

Att. Aye—clasping his dear consort in his arms
He weeps, and prays her not to leave him : vain
Is such fond wish, so wasted by disease
Like a dead weight she droops upon his arm ;
And yet, though hardly drawing breath of life,
She longs to look upon the blessed Sun
With one last lingering gaze.

Now will I go your presence to announce ; 190
For 'tis not all who wish their masters well,
And stand beside them in misfortune's hour :
But you my lord esteems as well-tried friends.

[*Exit Attendant.*]

Chorus (strophe).

Where or how shall we seek relief,
Great Zeus, from our suffering?
Who shall deliverance find from grief
Such as assails our King?
No tidings yet we hear :
Is it the time to shear
The lock of votive hair, 200
And sable garments wear?

Sure we may be, dear friends ; yet the Gods will
listen to prayer :

Theirs is the mighty power. O Healer of woe,
we crave,

Now, as before, release Admetus from dire despair—
From the fell grasp of Death the unhappy victim
save.

(*antistrophe.*)

Woe is me ! well-a-day, I cry,
O Pheres' son, for thy fate,
Now thy belovèd is snatched away
Leaving thee desolate !

Well might he now lay hand 210
 On suicidal brand,
 Or from above suspend
 A noose, and so make end.

Dear, aye dearest, the spouse whose death on this
 very day

Ye will behold: but, look ye! her husband leads
 her forth,

Forth from this house of woe, a lady of highest
 worth,

Doomed to the under-world, by disease consumed
 away.

'Tis hard to tell if wedded life
 Is more with joy or sorrow rife:
 Experience past, and present woe 220
 Befall'n our King, the truth must show,
 To whom, of bravest consort reft,
 A life unliveable is left.

Enter Alcestis from the palace, supported by Admetus and Eumelus.

Alc. (strophe). O Sun, O Light of Day—
 O eddying clouds that fly
 Across the vaulted sky!—

Adm. He sees us both, partners in this sad lot,
 Whose sins have not deserved that thou should'st die.

Alc. (antistrophe).
 O land, and sheltering home,
 Iolcos, city blest, 230
 My girlhood's happy nest!—

Adm. Poor soul! arouse thyself: ah! give not o'er:
 Entreat the Gods who rule to pity thee.

Alc. (strophe).
 What is this vision? I see the boat on the waters drear;

Hark! the ferry-man calls as he grasps the oar—
(dost hear?)

‘Hasten! why hinder me with delay?’

Thus he hurries me fast away.

Adm. Alas! of dismal voyage is thy tale.

Ill-fated spouse, how sore our suffering!

Alc. (*antistrophe*).

See'st thou not? he drags me away to the halls of
woe, 240

Winged angel of Death: how his eyes like a
firebrand glow!

Loose me—avaunt! woe is me! how dread

Looms the journey on which I am sped!

Adm. Sad for thy friends, but above all to me

And to thy children, who must share this grief.

Alc. Hold me not—my strength ebbs fast—

Lay me down, no more to rise—

Mists of death steal o'er mine eyes.

Sweet my children, look your last

On a mother who departs—

250

So farewell for aye, dear hearts!

Adm. Farewell—this grievous word to hear

More than a thousand deaths I fear.

By all that's sacred I implore—

By these thine orphans, leave us not—

Revive thy fainting heart once more:

For without thee too sad our lot:

On thee our life or death depends

For love that passeth that of friends.

259

Alc. Admetus, since thou see'st me near to death,

I bid thee listen to my latest wish.

Preferring thee in honour, I have wrought

That thou should'st live: have offered mine own
life

Instead of thine, though I might yet have lived,
And with Thessalian husband of my choice
Dwelt in a sumptuous palace as a Queen :
But could not brook a life apart from thee
With orphan children : nay, I did not grudge
To sacrifice all gifts of joyous youth.
Yet did thy sire and mother give thee up, 270
Though it were opportune for them to die
In years and honour, having saved their son.
They had no other offspring, and no hope
Of children yet to come when thou wert dead :
So might we two have measured out our lives
Together, and thou would'st not, widowed thus,
With motherless children mourn thy solitude.
Now all is changed—such is the will of Heaven.
So be it—yet forget not gratitude ;
No strict equivalent I ask of thee, 280
(Since nought can be more highly prized than life)
But, as thou wilt acknowledge, a just boon ;—
Since no whit less than I thou lovest these
With upright heart, allow that they shall rule
This household : no step-mother bring to them
Unworthy of thy love, whose jealousy
May on our darlings lay a cruel hand.
Far be this from thee, is my earnest prayer :
For such a second mother loathes the brood
She bare not—in her heart a viper dwells. 290
A boy finds in his father a strong tower ;
But how shall fare in growth to womanhood
My daughter ? how disposed to her will be
The father's consort ? for the child I fear
Some slander might be spread abroad to smirch
Her youth's fair fame in honest suitors' eyes.
No mother, child, will deck thee as a bride,

Or comfort thee in travail, when no presence
Is kindlier than a mother's : for I die— 299
Not one or two days hence will come the end—
Forthwith I shall be numbered with the dead.
Farewell ! be happy all ! thy boast shall be,
My husband, that thy wife was good and brave ;
And yours, my children, that she gave you birth.

Chor. Take heart. For him I confidently speak ;
He will not fail thee, if his heart be true.

Adm. Fear not—all shall be done. My only wife
Alive thou wast, and shalt be so in death :
In thy dear stead shall no Thessalian bride
E'er call me husband : nay, no woman lives 310
So nobly born, or of such matchless beauty,
That I should woo her ; and I rest content
With these our children. Heaven give me joy
Of them ; too little have I had of thee !
Not only for a year I'll mourn my loss,
But all my life, hating both father's sight
And mother's too, who though professing love
By no deed proved it ; but thy sweet young life
Thou gav'st for mine. Must I not then lament
The loss of such an helpmate ? For thy sake 320
All revel, all good cheer and feast shall cease :
No more will I lay finger to the harp,
Or rouse my soul to song with Libyan flute,
For joy with thee has vanished from my life.
But skilful artist hands shall counterfeit
Thy living image on a couch reclined :
There will I bow myself, and with embrace
Call on thy name ; and though thou art not there
Hold thee in fancy with my loving arms.
Fond pleasure truly ! yet 'twill help to ease 330
The burden of my life. Come in my dreams

To comfort me ! howe'er it may befall,
 'Tis sweet to see our loved ones e'en in sleep.
 If only Orpheus' tuneful voice were mine,
 To charm the Queen or King of Shadow-land
 And fetch thee thence away, I would descend,
 Nor would I stay for Hades' sentinel hound,
 Or him who oars the souls across the stream,
 Till I had led thee back to life and light.
 Yet wait my coming yonder when I die, 340
 Then find a home where I may dwell with thee ;
 For I will order in the self-same bier
 My body to be laid, that I may touch
 Thy side with mine : not even death shall part
 Me from my only love, so faithful proved.

Chor. Truly as friend with friend I will with thee
 This mourning share, such tribute she deserves.

Alc. Children, ye heard your father's firm resolve
 That he would hither bring no other wife
 To mother you and so dishonour me. 350

Adm. Again I say it, this shall be fulfilled.

Alc. Take then these children as a trust from me.

Adm. A gift of love from loving hands I take.

Alc. Be thou to them a mother in my stead.

Adm. Aye—for they need it, thus bereft of thee.

Alc. Children, when I most need to live, I die.

Adm. Alas ! what then can I, left lonely, do ?

Alc. Time brings relief : the dead are counted not.

Adm. Ah ! lead me with thee to the shades below !

Alc. Nay—be content that I go yonder first. 360

Adm. How dear a helpmate, Fate, thou stealest from me !

Alc. Now spreads a film of darkness o'er my sight.

Adm. Then am I lost, if thou must leave us so.

Alc. Already thou may'st speak of me as dead.

Adm. Leave not thy children : raise thy drooping head,

Alc. Unwillingly I go : Sweet hearts, farewell !

Adm. Look on them yet again.

Alc. I am no more. [*swoons.*

Adm. What means this swoon ?

Alc. Farewell ! [*dies.*

Adm. O fatal day !

Chor. Admetus' wife has passed, and ceased to live.

Eum. (*strophe*).

Hapless motherless child am I, 370

Father, she's left us lonely, and gone

Far from the sun-lit sky.

Closed are her eyes—her arms hang down :

Mother ! I call thee—'tis I : oh hear,

Hear thy little one call,

As on thy lips I fall.

Adm. Deaf to all voice is she, and sees us not :

With heavy sorrow thus all three are stricken.

Eum. (*antistrophe*).

Young am I to be left alone,

Father, without a mother's care. 380

Suffering we must share,

Dearest sister, brave little heart ;

Father, in grief is thy wedded life

Ended : she could not wait,

And our home is desolate.

Chor. Admetus, all must needs such trials bear :

Others before have lost a blameless wife,

And others will hereafter : rest assured

Death is a debt that all poor mortals owe.

Adm. I know it. This sad fate not unforeseen 390

Has lighted on me : for long time the thought

Has tortured me. But I must now prepare

The burial : I bid you all remain

In presence, and with antiphonal dirge

Invoke the stern inexorable God.
 All my Thessalian subjects I command
 To take their part in mourning for the Queen
 With locks close shorn and garb of sable hue.
 And let all owners of yoked chariot teams 399
 Or single-harnessed steeds, with sharpened steel
 Clip their luxuriant manes : let sound of flute
 And twang of lyre be silent in the streets
 Until twelve moons have waned. No dearer corse
 To me or kindlier can this earth enfold :
 Worthiest of honour, since for me she died.

[*All leave the stage.*

First Stasimon.

Chorus.

(*strophe.*)

Daughter of Pelias, fare thee well !
 Dwell thou in peace in thy sunless home !
 We to the raven-haired God will tell,
 And to the spirits' ferry-man hoar
 Who sits by rudder and oar, 410
 That the noblest woman of all has come
 O'er the dark mere to be conveyed
 By the stroke of his double blade.

(*antistrophe.*)

Oft shall masters of music praise
 Thee on the sevenfold strings that sound
 Backed by the mountain-tortoise shell ;
 And in unaccompanied lays,
 When the circling feast comes round
 At Sparta's city or Athens bright, 419
 And the full moon hangs on high all night,
 Of thy death will poets tell.

(*strophe.*)

Oh that the power were mine
 In the bark of the nether stream

From the prison below
And the river of woe
Thy soul to redeem,
Dearest lady, for thou alone
To ransom thy husband's life wast brave
At the price of thine own :
Light be the mould of thy grave ! 430
Should thy husband choose a second mate,
Thy children and I such choice would hate.
(*antistrophe.*)

His mother refused to die—
His father would not comply
With a son's request ;
Though both would find rest
From the toils of old age,
Courage failed them : but thou art dead,
Passed from the scene of youth's bright stage
In thy husband's stead. 440
Such an united pair
Be my lot to meet : in life it is rare :
With such could I live for aye without care.

Enter Hercules.

Her. Say, friends who dwell in Pheres' wide domain,
Within the house shall I Admetus find ?

Chor. Aye surely : Pheres' son is not abroad.

But tell us, pray, what need has brought thee hither.

Her. A labour which Eurystheus has imposed.

Chor. Whither art bound ? what does thy wand'ring
seek ?

Her. To fetch the chariot team of Diomed. 450

Chor. Arduous the task : know'st thou perchance that
host ?

Her. Nay : never yet trod I Bistonian soil.

Chor. 'Twill cost a struggle to secure those mares.

Her. But I am not the man to shun the task.

Chor. Him thou must slay, or, slain, return no more.

Her. 'Tis not the first time I have faced such odds.

Chor. What will thou gain by overcoming him?

Her. I shall bring back the mares to Tiryns' lord.

Chor. No easy matter e'en to bridle them. 459

Her. Easy enough, unless they breathe forth flames.

Chor. But human flesh they rend with ravening jaws.

Her. Wild beasts of prey, not horses, thus are fed.

Chor. Their mangers thou may'st see dabbled with blood.

Her. Who is reputed father to this man?

Chor. Ares, whose subject tribes vaunt gilded shields.

Her. Herein no slight addition to my toils

Hard destiny enjoins: the climax this.

Two other sons of Ares have I fought,

Lycaon first, then Cynus, and the third

I go t'engage, the owner of this team, 470

And tame his savage mares: yet no man lives

Who e'er shall see Alcmena's valiant son

Shrinking in terror from an armèd foe.

Chor. See, here Admetus, monarch of this land,

[*Enter Admetus.*

Forth from his palace comes to welcome thee.

Adm. Hail, son of Zeus, scion of Perseus' race!

Her. Hail thou, Admetus, too, Thessalia's lord!

Adm. For thy good wish much thanks: I know thee kind.

Her. Why thus in evidence of mourning shorn?

Adm. This day I must attend a burial. 480

Her. Not (grant it Heav'n!) of any child of thine?

Adm. Nay: all my children are within, alive.

Her. Were it thy father, he is ripe for death.

Adm. Both he, and she who bare me, yet survive.

Her. Surely thy wife Alcestis is not dead?

Adm. Twofold the tale of her I have to tell.

Her. Of her as living woman, or as dead?

Adm. She lives, and yet is not, to my distress.

Her. I am no wiser for thy riddling words. 489

Adm. Hast thou not heard the fate in store for her?

Her. I heard she was content to die for thee.

Adm. How can she live then, if agreed to that?

Her. Till that day comes, no need to utter grief.

Adm. The doomed are dead—the dead have ceased
to be.

Her. To be is different judged from not to be.

Adm. Such is thy judgement: I judge otherwise.

Her. Come, tell me why, for what friend's death,
thou'rt sad.

Adm. A woman's: of a woman is my tale.

Her. Strange to thy race is she, or near of kin?

Adm. Strange, but by other tie connected here. 500

Her. How came it then that in thy house she died?

Adm. Left fatherless, she found a refuge here.

Her. Would I had not intruded on thy grief!

Adm. With what new purpose utt'rest thou that wish?

Her. Elsewhere I'll wend for hospitality.

Adm. Nay, do not so; bring not such pain on me.

Her. A guest's arrival burdens those who mourn.

Adm. The dead are dead and gone: let us within.

Her. In mourner's house 'tis shame to sit at feast.

Adm. But come to that guest-hall which lies apart.

Her. Nay, let me go: so earn my gratitude. 511

Adm. No other host shall entertain my guest.

(*To the attendants.*)

Ho there! lead on and ope the outer hall

For guests appointed! bid the caterers

Set on abundant viands—shut the doors

That separate the courts: it is not meet

That sounds of mourning vex our feasting guest.

[*Exit Her. with attendants.*]

Chor. What dost thou? in this time of deep distress

Thou'rt mad to force thyself and play the host.

Adm. Well—had I chased him, coming as a guest, 520

From house and city, would'st thou have approved?

Not so: my trouble would be none the less,

And I a more inhospitable churl.

And there would be a further brunt to bear,

That my house were reviled for spurning guests.

Besides I find in him a worthy host,

Whene'er I visit Argos' parchèd land.

Chor. How then could'st thou conceal thy present hap,

If he who came was, as thou say'st, a friend?

Adm. He ne'er would have consented to abide, 530

If he had certain knowledge of my woes.

Doubtless to some my act will madness seem,

And lack approval; but to thrust away

Guests in contempt, this house shall ne'er consent.

[*Exit Admetus.*]

Chor. (strophe).

Second Stasimon.

Dwelling-place of free-born lord,

Hospitable house and board,

'Neath thy roof Apollo deigned to dwell,

Lord of Music: here in shepherd's guise

Through the winding glades he oft would tell

On his pipe the tale of love-lorn shepherds' sighs.

(*antistrophe.*)

By his tune enchanted came 541

Herds of spotted lynxes, tame:

Down from Othrys' forest danced amain

Troops of tawny lions to his strain,

And from pine-tree covert lured away

Skipped the nimble fawns rejoicing in the lay.

(*strophe.*)

Rich henceforth in flocks our lord's domain
 All along fair Boebe's marge extends—
 Rich in pasture land and fields of grain :
 Tow'rd the setting sun its limit ends 550
 At Molossian clime, and eastward trends

Far as Pelion, tow'rd th' Aegean rock-bound strand.
 (*antistrophe.*)

Now with open house and open hand,
 Though in tears, our lord his guest receives,
 While for consort lying dead he grieves,
 Noble minds respect what others feel,
 Truest wisdom proving : so my heart
 Trusts the righteous man to play a worthy part.

*Re-enter Admetus with the corpse and the attendants
 from the palace.*

Adm. Ye men of Pherae, kindly are ye come.
 Now to the funeral pyre attendants bring 560
 The corse, with all that's needed, borne aloft ;
 Your part remains, as use demands, to speed
 On its last journey the departing soul.

[*Procession starts.*]

Chor. See—hither bends thy sire his aged steps,
 And in his train by careful hands are borne
 Rich offerings, adornment for the dead.

Enter Pheres (meeting the funeral procession).

Phe. I come in pity for thy grief, my son ;
 So good and chaste, as all maintain, was she
 Whom thou hast lost ; but such calamity,
 Hard though it be, must patiently be borne. 570
 Take thou this off'ring, and beneath the earth
 Bestow it : rightly honour we her corse
 Who gave her life to ransom thine, my son,

And thus made me not childless, nor allowed
My stricken years in melancholy grief
To pine away, but glorified her sex
By courage prompting such a noble deed.
O thou who savedst him and raisedst me
Down-stricken, fare thee well! in Hades' realm
May'st thou be happy! blessed is a man 580
With such a wife, else were he best unwed.

Adm. Thou cam'st not to this burial at my call,
Nor reckon I thy presence as a friend's.
Off'ring of thine shall never deck her form—
No gift from thee shall in her grave be laid.
Where was thy pity when my end was near,
And thou didst stand aloof, old man from young,
Letting him perish? Canst thou then lament
This victim? now I see I am no son
Of thy begetting; but some menial womb 590
Bare me to be a foster-child to her
Men call my mother: stranger thou art proved
When put to test, father to me no more.
In this thy craven heart exceeds all bounds,
That, having reached th' allotted term of years,
No courage hadst thou to consent to die
In thy son's stead; yet did ye, parents both,
Give up this lady, not of kindred blood,
But who, I justly may esteem, fulfilled
A father's duty and a mother's care. 600
And yet thou could'st have honourably faced
This doom for thy son's sake, so short a time
In any case remained for thee to live.
Nay, more: all that prosperity can bestow
Thou hast enjoyed: a King in prime of youth,
With due succession to thine heir assured,
By death thy house would not be childless left

For strangers' hands to plunder. Canst thou say
That I, without respect for thy grey hairs, 609
For death designed thee? I, whose constant thought
Thee most regarded? See with what exchange
Thou and my mother have repaid the debt!

Lose then no time, if sons thou would'st beget
To comfort thine old age, and when thou diest
To lay thy body ready for the tomb:

These hands shall take no part in burying thee;
For, as regards thee, I have ceased to live.

But if some new protector during life

I find, his son I'll be, and his old age

Will comfort. Old men idly pray for death, 620

Complain of age infirm and length of days;

But when death comes, none welcome his approach:

No longer do they feel the weight of years.

Chor. Ah, cease! does not our present woe suffice?

Let not a son provoke a father's wrath!

Phe. Am I a base hired slave, that with abuse

Thou dost so insolently thus assail me?

Dost thou forget that from Thessalian sire

Free and legitimate descent I claim?

Too harsh these insults: such presumptuous words
Shall not be uttered with impunity. 631

I brought thee up as heir to rule my house:

Where lay the claim that I should die for thee?

Neither in this, nor any land of Greece

Hear I that fathers wont to die for sons.

Thy life's thine own, be fortune good or ill,

And what is due to thee from me thou hast:

Thou rulest now o'er many—at my death

The broad domain which I inherited

Will be thy portion. Have I done thee wrong?

Or taken aught by fraud?—I ask thee not 641

To die for me, why then should I for thee?
 If life delights thee, must it not delight
 Thy father also? long methinks will be
 The time below, while here all life is short,
 Yet sweet withal. 'Twas shame of thee to fight
 Against thy fate, and mastering it to live
 By slaying her: how canst thou call me craven
 Being thyself o'erpowered by woman's will
 Who died instead of thee—O noble youth! 650
 Sagely hast thou devised to live for ever,
 If thou shalt bid thy wife, whoe'er she be,
 To sacrifice herself. Why then reproach
 Friends who will not comply, proving thyself
 A coward? No more words: only reflect
 That all love life as thou dost: heap on me
 Abuse, and thou shalt hear harsh words, but true.

Chor. Too many such, now and ere now, we've heard:
 Cease, aged sire—no more revile thy son. 659

Adm. Say on, for I have done: if truth to hear

Annoys thee, thou should'st not have done me wrong.

Phe. Worse wrong, if I had died for such as thou.

Adm. What? to the young and old means death the
 same?

Phe. We live but once—no second life may claim.

Adm. May'st thou outlive immortal Zeus himself!

Phe. Why wish me evil in return for good?

Adm. Because I see thou lovest length of life.

Phe. And thou?—else why this corse instead of thine?

Adm. Thy cowardice, not mine, compassed her fate.

Phe. Nay, I was not the cause: assert not that.

Adm. Would that thou might'st some day have need
 of me! 671

Phe. Go on—woo others, that more wives may die!

Adm. The shame would fall on thee who fearedst death.

Phe. Dear is the blessèd light of Heaven, too dear.

Adm. Nay, craven is thy heart: no man art thou.

Phe. An old man's burial would have pleased thee more.

Adm. Dishonoured still will be thy latter end.

Phe. Words of abuse will not affect me then.

Adm. Alas! what shameless feelings mar old age!

Phe. Senseless, not shameless thou didst find thy wife. 680

Adm. Away! let me in peace bury my dead.

Phe. I go: thou buriest one whom thou hast slain:

Her kindred will demand thy punishment.

Acastus, if he proves himself a man,

On thee will yet avenge his sister's blood. [*Exit.*

Adm. Well rid am I of you, ye childless pair

Whose child still lives: fulfil your latter years

As ye deserve. No more the selfsame roof

Shall shelter us. If need were, publicly

Would I disown my native hearth and home. 690

Now, friends, the grief that waits us must be met:

Go we and lay the body on the pyre.

Chor. Ah! well-a-day! courageous heart,

Noblest and best of all, farewell!

Pluto receive, and Hermes guide

Thee kindly; and if yonder aught

Of benefit reward the good,

May'st thou be honoured and enthroned

Beside Persephone the Queen! [*Exeunt.*

Enter Servant from the palace.

Ser. Many a guest from many a land ere now 700

I've known arriving at Admetus' halls,

And set before them viands; but ne'er yet

Any more reckless have I entertained

Than this, who first, although he saw my lord
Bowed down with sorrow, dared to pass our gates,
And next immoderately took his fill
Of what was offered—though he knew our grief—
And what we did not offer bade us fetch.
He clutched the ivy goblet, and gulped down
The unmixed produce of the parent vine 710
Till, mounting to his brain, its ardent fumes
Excited him: he crowned his brow with wreath
Of myrtle, and uncouthly bawled the while.
Two separate tunes 'twas then my lot to hear—
His royst'ring song, unmindful of distress
To all the house, and cries of our lament
For the dear mistress; yet we hid our tears
By order of the master. Thus I wait
Upon a guest who's but a cunning thief,
While she has left us, and I followed not, 720
Nor gave a parting hand. I mourn thee, lady,
To me and all our household mother-like,
Who shieldedst us from manifold rebukes,
Soothing the master's wrath. Am I not right
To hate such guest's arrival while we mourn?

Enter Hercules, going after the servant.

Her. How now—what means this solemn brooding look?
The servant may not scowl upon a guest,
But wait on him with courteous willing mien:
Yet thou attendest on thy master's friend
With pucker'd brow and visage threatening, 730
Troubled with sorrow that concerns thee not.
Come hither, that I may improve thy wits.
Know'st thou the nature of all mortal things?
I deem thou canst not: listen then to me.
Death is a debt that every mortal owes:

No one of them can reckon on a morrow,
So hidden are unstable Fortune's ways,
Not to be taught, nor ascertained by seer.
Now having learnt this lesson from my lips,
Drink, and be merry : live thy life to-day, 740
For that is thine ; the rest doth Fortune rule.
Honour besides the Cyprian Goddess : she
Is most desired of men, and kindly too.
Let all else go ; and (if I reason right
In your opinion, as in mine I do,)
By me be guided : wrestle with this grief,
And cast its care away : pledge me in wine,
Crown thee with garlands : for I know full well
The splash of wine in cup will quickly change
The moody favour of thy pent-up thought. 750
Mortal we are : mortal must be our aims ;
For those who gloomily knit solemn brows,
If you accept my judgement, cannot know
Life as it should be, theirs is but mishap.

Ser. All this I grant thee ; but our present state
Cannot admit of revelry and joy.

Her. Away with sorrow ! she was nought to thee
Who died : the rulers of the house still live.

Ser. Live, say'st thou ? then thou know'st not our
distress ?

Her. Surely, unless thy master spake me false. 760

Ser. Too generous is his hospitality.

Her. What—should a stranger's death have marred
my pleasure ?

Ser. Stranger indeed : too much a stranger now.

Her. Is there some trouble that he mentioned not ?

Ser. Ask me no more : our master's grief is ours.

Her. Some intimate affliction thou impliest.

Ser. Else had I not resented thy good cheer.

Her. Have I then by my host been sorely wronged?

Ser. It was no fitting time for guest to come.

Her. A child perhaps he mourns, or aged sire? 770

Ser. Nay, worse: she was his wife who is no more.

Her. Can this be true! and yet ye entertained me?

Ser. He was ashamed to turn thee from our doors.

Her. Unhappy man! how terrible his loss!

Ser. We are all lost, not only she who died.

Her. I noticed his dim eyes awash with tears,

His hair close shorn, and gloomy countenance;

Yet he persuaded me the burial

Was of a stranger maid, and so I crossed

Reluctantly the threshold, and caroused 780

Within the palace of a generous host

So sore afflicted! Ah, how could I crown

This head with festive garland! how could'st thou

Conceal the misery that o'erwhelms this house!

(*pause.*)

Where does he lay her? could one find the spot?

Ser. Beside the road that to Larissa leads,

Without the gates, the sculptured tomb shines clear.

[*Exit.*]

Her. Now is the time for my undaunted heart

And arm of steel to show what kind of son

Tirynthian Alcmena bare to Zeus. 790

For I must rescue her whom Death has claimed—

Alcestis—and set up this house again

On a firm basis, for Admetus' sake.

This sable-mantled master of the dead

I'll watch for, and I look to light on him

Drinking blood-off'rings by the tomb; and if

From hidden ambush leaping forth I catch

And circle him with these untiring arms,

No one shall loose his over-strained ribs

Till he surrender me his prey : or else, 800
 If he go not to seek his mess of blood,
 And I be cheated of my catch, I'll go
 Down to the sunless shades of Hades' realm
 Demanding her, and without doubt bring back
 The lost one to the light, and to the arms
 Of that fast friend who drove me not away
 From his abode, though with distress sore smitten,
 But nobly hid his grief, respecting me.
 What man of Thessaly, or in all Greece
 So hospitable? It shall ne'er be said 810
 Such courtesy was churlishly received. [*Exit on his
 way to the tomb of Alcestis.*]

*Re-enter Admetus and Chorus on their way from the
 funeral pyre to the palace.*

Adm. O sad approach ! O hateful sight
 Of widowed halls ! Ah, woe is me !
 Where can I go—where rest ? how speak
 Or how be dumb ? would I were dead !
 For heavy sorrow was I born.
 The dead I envy, yearn for them,
 In their abode I long to dwell :
 No joy to me Heav'n's light affords—
 No joy the earth on which I tread ; 820
 Such hostage Death hath snatched away,
 And giv'n in trust to Hades' hand !

Chor. (*strophe*). Stay not here—into thy inner house
 retire.

Adm. Woe, ah woe !

Chor. Wrung from affliction's depth that cry.

Adm. Fatal day !

Chor. What is thy pain I surely know.

Adm. All is lost !

Chor. Wailing profiteth not the dead.

Adm. Breaks my heart!

Chor. Saddest of griefs that the loved one's face
Never again on thee will smile.

Adm. Thy words recall my sore heart's wound. 830

What greater sorrow than to lose
A faithful wife? would I had lived
Unwedded here! I envy all
The childless men who single live:
One life alone for each to lose
Is tolerable grief.

But childhood's sickness, and the sight
Of childbirth racked with deadly pangs
Cannot be borne: more blest the life
Without a child—without a wife! 840

Chor. (*antistrophe*).

Fate—stern Fate: vain the struggle against its power.

Adm. Ruthless Fate!

Chor. Limit of grief thou canst not fix.

Adm. Bleeds my heart.

Chor. Weighty burden: but even this—

Adm. Dead, alas!

Chor. must be borne: thou art not the first:

Adm. Lost, ah lost!

Chor. Others are widowed—in many shapes

Sorrow afflicts the sons of men.

Adm. Rent is the heart with lasting pain

For dear departed friends.

Why didst thou stay me when I would
Have leaped into the hollow grave 850

And with my darling lain at rest?

Pluto would hold united then

Two faithful souls instead of one,

Together ferried o'er the lake.

Chor. (strophe).

Of a kinsman I could tell
Whom a grievous loss befell
Of an only son :
Yet he bore his childless state
With affliction moderate
In the latter stage
Of a hoary age

860

When his course was wellnigh run.

Adm. How can I enter thee, drear home?
How dwell with lot so sadly changed?
Alas! the difference to me!
Not long ago I brought her home
From Pelion's forest dark with pine
To sound of nuptial song and shout
Of cheery escort, hand in hand
With my sweet bride; so happy seemed
She who is dead, and I: for both
Were nobly born, of lineage high,
And in glad union joined.
But now the voice of mourning shrills,
And garments black in place of white
Escort me to my lonely bed.

870

Chor. (antistrophe).

In a time of happiness
Presseth hard this sore distress
On a heart untried :
Yet the death of a loving wife
Has secured to thee dear life.
'Tis a common fate
To be desolate

880

For the loss of a youthful bride.

Adm. Less happy, friends, I deem my destiny
Than hers who died, though otherwise it seems.

No pain or sorrow e'er will reach her more,
 But from all toil she earns an honoured rest.
 While I, whose doom it was no more to live,
 Escaping fate, a wretched life must lead. 890
 I see it all at last, and understand.
 How can I bear to enter by these doors?
 Whom could I greet, or who could greeting give,
 That it should please me? Whither shall I turn?
 The loneliness within would drive me forth
 When I beheld her chamber's emptiness,
 The seat whereon she sat, and all the house
 Uncared for, while the children round my knees
 Cling, weeping for their mother, and the slaves
 Lament their mistress lost. Such woeful sights
 Wait me within : yet from without a crowd 901
 Of married citizens, and companies
 Of women-folk would drive me back again ;
 For never could I brook the sight of youth
 Reminding me of hers : and I shall hear
 Unfriendly words—' Behold this dastard—one
 Who dared not die, but coward-like gave up
 His wife to save himself : call him a man,
 Who hates his parents, meanly shirking death ?'
 Such scorn of me will evil tongues proclaim ; 910
 And how can I live yet in fair renown
 With evil fortune, and an evil name? [Exit.

Third Stasimon.

Chor. (strophe).

I have searched the Muses' storehouse, and the
 heights of science scaled.
 Yet to find a mightier power than Necessity have
 failed :
 Vain the secrets Thracian bards have stored—

Vain what Orpheus' melodies record,
Or the remedies that Phoebus to Asclepius' sons
revealed

For th' infirmities of men,
(*antistrophe.*)

Thou alone hast neither altar, nor image set in shrine :
No sacrifice thou needest. I pray thee, Power divine,
Spare us : e'en what mighty Zeus has willed
Cannot be without thine aid fulfilled : 922
Thou canst bend the tempered steel, nor regardest
what is planned

By the stubborn will of men.
(*strophe.*) Thee, Admetus, has the Goddess in unyielding
feters bound ;

Yet be patient, for thou canst not bring the dead
from 'neath the ground :
E'en the offspring of the Gods must in darkness
pine away.

She was dear to thee on earth, and in death will
still be dear,

For the noblest bravest wife
Was the partner of thy life. 930
(*antistrophe.*)

Let the tomb be not accounted as concealing mortal
clay,

But be honoured as divine by all that pass that way :
He whose foot is on the cross-road with reverence
will say—

'For her husband's sake she died, and is now among
the blest :

Peace be thine, O holy shade !
Bless us with thy kindly aid !'

But see, Admetus, as it seems, there comes
Alcmena's son to visit thine abode,

Enter Hercules, leading a muffled figure.

Her. In dealing with a friend 'tis right to speak
 With candour, not in silence to suppress 940
 Cause of complaint; and I, when face to face
 With thy distress, claimed to be proved a friend :
 Yet of thy wife laid out for burial
 Thou spakest not, but welcomedst the guest
 As though the sorrow did not touch thy house.
 And I, with garland crowned, libations poured
 To all the Gods, in thine afflicted home.
 Yet, though I blame thee for that welcoming,
 I will not add a pang to thy distress :
 My purpose now for which I have returned 950
 I will disclose :—this damsel from my hands
 I pray thee take, and guard till I have slain
 The Thracian King and brought away his team :
 But should I fail and never more return,
 Keep her to minister to household needs.
 After sharp contest fell she to my lot :—
 Some public games I came upon by chance,
 A competition of athletic skill,
 And carried off this prize for my success.
 The victors in the lighter contests won 960
 A team of horses, but in more severe,
 Boxing and wrestling bouts, a herd of oxen,
 And with this herd a damsel too was giv'n :
 So fair a prize I could not well forgo.
 In thy charge then I leave her, as I said,
 No stolen booty, but reward of toil.
 Haply thou wilt in time approve my act.
Adm. Not slighting thee at all or counting thee
 Other than friend did I conceal the truth.
 It would have been a grief added to grief 970
 If thou hadst gone to seek another host :

Enough for me to mourn my own distress,
 As for this maiden, if 'tis possible,
 I pray thee trust her to some citizen
 Who has not fared as I : for thou hast friends
 In Pherae : of the past remind me not.
 I could not see her in this house of mine
 With tearless eyes : I am too sore oppressed
 To bear fresh burden on a fainting heart.
 That she is young her garments testify : 980
 Where in this household could a maiden lodge ?
 She must not be molested by rough men
 Whom it were hard to curb : thine interest
 I still regard. Nor could I give her place
 In that sad chamber sacred to the dead.
 'Twould be a scandal for my subjects' tongues
 To dwell upon, that I should traitor prove
 To my first love ; and to her memory
 A slight, whose virtue claims deserved respect.
 These things demand much forethought. Whosoe'er
 This maiden be, in stature and in form 991
 Alcestis she resembles : from my sight
 Remove her, I entreat thee, lest I be
 Caught in the snare, thinking I gaze upon
 My own dear wife : this troubles my poor heart,
 And draws a flood of tears. Ah ! wretched fate !
 With quicken'd sense I taste its bitterness.
Chor. No one could call thee Fortune's favourite ;
 But every man must bow to Heaven's decree.
Her. Would that I had the power to raise thy wife
 From nether regions to the blessed light, 1001
 And make return for all thy courtesy !
Adm. I know thou hast the will, but all in vain :
 The dead cannot return to gladsome day.
Her. Do not make worse what thou'rt ordained to bear.

Adm. Easier it is to counsel than endure.

Her. What canst thou gain by mourning all thy life?

Adm. I know 'tis vain, but longing rules my will.

Her. Love that regrets the dead must draw a tear.

Adm. It has unmanned me more than I can tell.

Her. None will deny she was a noble wife. 1011

Adm. And therefore life has no more joy for me.

Her. Time will allay the smart, now keenest felt.

Adm. So might it be, if but that time were death.

Her. A second marriage would give peace and love.

Adm. Silence! thy words offend me: no such thought—

Her. What! dost thou mean to live alone, unwed?

Adm. No woman lives who e'er shall share my home.

Her. Thinkest thou thus to gratify the dead? 1019

Adm. Her honour, where she is, must be maintained.

Her. I grant it, but the world will call it folly.

Adm. Peace! thou shalt never call me bridegroom more.

Her. Thy faithful constancy wins my applause.

Adm. Though dead, if I desert her, may I die!

Her. Well then, receive this damsel generously.

Adm. Forbear, I charge thee by thy father Jove!

Her. In not consenting thou wilt greatly err.

Adm. Perhaps: but to consent will wound my heart.

Her. Be kind: this favour may supply a need.

Adm. Out on it! would thou hadst not won such prize!

Her. Thou dost, however, share my victory. 1031

Adm. Thou pleadest well: but let her go her way.

Her. If right, she shall: first judge if right it be.

Adm. It is, unless it will arouse thy wrath.

Her. Something I know which spurs my eagerness.

Adm. I yield—but with thy plan cannot agree.

Her. Some day thou wilt approve: believe my words.

Adm. (to attendants).

Ho there! lead on within—since it must be.

Her. Nay, not to menials will I leave my charge.

Adm. Then, if thou wilt, enter with her thyself. 1040

Her. Nay, I will rather place her in thy hands.

Adm. I will not touch her : but my doors are open.

Her. In thy right hand alone I put my trust.

Adm. Thou forcest me, sir, much against my will.

Her. Come, give thy hand, and take the stranger
maid's.

Adm. Well—there it is : but I avert mine eyes.

Her. 'Tis done : now guard her safe, and in good time

Thou'lt say the son of Jove was worthy guest.

Now look on her : does she a likeness bear

To thy lost wife? [*unveils Alcestis.*] Be happy—cease
to mourn! 1050

Adm. Ye Gods, what can I say? beyond all hope

A marvel! 'tis indeed my very wife—

Unless some god in mockery sends this joy.

Her. Not so—thine eyes are not deceived—'tis she.

Adm. Perchance some spirit from the vasty deep?

Her. No spirit's escort is thy recent guest.

Adm. Buried she was : can she be here alive?

Her. Surely : yet thou hast cause for lack of faith.

Adm. Alive, to feel my touch, or hear my voice?

Her. Speak to her, for thou hast thy heart's desire.

Adm. Oh ! my belovèd ! sweetest face and form ! 1061

I hold thee, though ne'er dreamed to see thee more!

Her. 'Tis well : may no God's envy thwart your joy!

Adm. Oh noble son of Jove all-powerful,

May thy great sire protect and bless thy life!—

Say, how didst thou contrive to bring her back?

Her. By fighting with that Power who claimed the
prey.

Adm. Where was this conflict held—this fight with
Death?

Her. Hard by the tomb I lurked and seized him fast.

Adm. Art dumb, dear wife? why dost thou speechless stand? 1070

Her. It is not lawful that she speak to thee

Till for three days she's offered sacrifice

Of expiation to the nether Gods.

Lead her within thy home; and, as befits,

Hereafter treat all guests with reverence due.

So fare thee well! I go to carry out

The task Eurystheus has appointed me.

Adm. Nay, bide with us, and grace our festal board.

Her. Some other time: for now I must away. [*Exit.*

Adm. All happiness be thine, and safe return! 1080

To all who in this town and province dwell

I give command that for this joyful issue

With choral dances and rich sacrifice

They bless the Gods in due thank-offering:

Changed is our lot: the cloud has passed away,

And Fortune beams upon this happy day.

Chorus.

The countless chances of our fate

Oft unforeseen results await:

To hopes of mortals unfulfilled

The Gods unlooked for issue send: 1090

Such was this drama's course, and such its end.

NOTES

PAGE 1. **Prologue.** It is an invariable custom with Euripides to open his plays with a monologue, put in the mouth generally of one of the *dramatis personae*, but sometimes of some other person, usually a deity, explaining the plot and the position of affairs when the play opens. In only two of his plays, the *Iphigenia in Aulis* and the *Rhesus*, the authenticity of which last is doubtful, is this prologue absent.

1. **House of Admetus.** This was at Pherae, one of the most ancient cities of Thessaly; it was situated in the south-east corner of Pelasgiotis. The modern town of Velestino stands on its site; the remains of the walls of the old town are still to be seen.

3. **Asclepius**, called also Aesculapius, was the son of Apollo by the nymph Coronis; for what is referred to see General Introduction.

5. **Cyclops crew.** The Cyclopes were Titans, the sons of Uranus and Gê, and they derived their name from having round or circular eyes, single in number, and placed in the midst of their forehead: their names were Arges, Steropes, and Brontes, and being reduced to subjection by Zeus they provided him with thunderbolts and lightning. For the allusion and for what follows see General Introduction.

12. **the Fates.** The divinities of the duration of life, and three in number, Clotho, the spinning fate, Lachesis, who assigns his fate to man, and Atropos, the fate that cannot be avoided.

PAGE 2, S. D. **Enter Death.** Death no doubt from below, through what was known on the Greek as Charon's ladder, a flight of steps leading to a vault beneath the orchestra.

38. **my custom.** The possession of a bow

tially associated with Apollo, that Horace describes him (*Odes*, iii. 4. 60) as 'never to lay aside the bow on his shoulder', 'nunquam humero positurus arcum'.

PAGE 3, 63. So strong a champion, &c. See note on l. 444.

72-3. the initial rite—shall shear. At the commencement of a sacrifice it was customary to cut off a few hairs from the living victim's head and to burn them in a fire as first-fruits. Death is here contemplated as a sacrificing priest and Alcestis as the victim.

S. D. Enter Chorus. This is the parodos or entrance song of the Chorus, sung as they came in from the side and advanced to the altar in the orchestra: the strophe was chanted as they advanced to the right, the anti-strophe as they executed a reverse movement to the left.

PAGE 4, 90. Lustral water. It was customary to place a vessel containing spring-water before the door of a house where a dead body was lying, so that those who entered might sprinkle themselves and so avoid pollution from the corpse.

97. Lycia's fane. This was the famous temple and oracle of Apollo at Patara, on the south-west coast of Lycia: it was second only to Delphi in importance.

99. Ammon's parchèd shrine. The temple of Jupiter Ammon; it was built on an oasis in the great Libyan desert. The modern name of the district in which it was situated is Ummebeda or Birbé.

105. Once Phoebus' son, &c. See General Introduction. The particular mortal whom Aesculapius is said to have raised from the dead, when Zeus in anger struck him with the thunderbolt, was Glaucus.

PAGE 5, 140. When first she knew. With this touching and beautiful account of the last moments of Alcestis should be compared Shakespeare's account of the last days and death of Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII*, Act iv. Sc. 2.

145. **Hear, Goddess.** What particular goddess Alcestis invoked it is impossible to say: it might have been Hestia or Vesta, whose altar stood in the recesses of the house and who was the tutelary divinity of the hearth; or it may have been Artemis, who was especially worshipped at Pherae as being the sister of Apollo and was commonly invoked in any circumstances having relation to marriage, as in her character of *Eileithyia* she presided over marriage.

147. **my orphans.** She had two children, a boy and a girl, Eumelus and Perimela.

PAGE 6, 154. **a myrtle bough.** The myrtle was associated both with funerals and with banquets; for its association with the latter see l. 713 below.

PAGE 7, 188. **blessed Sun.** Always the last object on which the ancient Greeks wished their eyes to rest, not from sentimental considerations only, but as a religious act.

200. **lock of votive hair.** There is no other evidence than that afforded by this passage that the lock of shorn hair was laid before the doors.

203. **Healer of woe.** An attribute and name of Apollo.

PAGE 8, 225. **eddyng clouds.** Said to be a technical reference to the theory of Anaxagoras that the clouds were impelled by a rotatory impulse, and, as such, ridiculed by the comic poet Aristophanes.

230. **Iolcos, city blest.** A pathetic reference to the home of her childhood. Her father Pelias was the king of Iolcos, and she was born there. Iolcos was in Magnesia in Thessaly, and was situated at the foot of Mount Pelion.

PAGE 9, 235. **the ferry-man.** Charon, who is fabled to convey the souls of the dead who have duly received their funeral rites over the Styx, the river in Hades.

PAGE 10, 265. **Thessalian husband.** Iolcos, where she had passed her girlhood, was in Thessaly, where she had had many suitors before she married Admetus.

289. **second mother.** Among the ancients the cruelty of step-mothers was proverbial. Aeschylus (*Prom.* 727) speaks of a dangerous coast as 'a step-mother of ships', and Horace (*Epod.* 5. 9) speaks of a savage and cruel expression on the face as the look of a step-mother.

PAGE 11, 323. **Libyan flute.** The wood out of which flutes were commonly made was the lotus, a plant which grew in Libya. Libya was that portion of Africa which lay between Aegypt, Aethiopia, and the shores of the Atlantic, and which was bounded on the north by the Mediterranean Sea, and to the south by the Indian Ocean.

PAGE 12, 334. **Orpheus' tuneful voice.** The famous poet and musician of whose wonderful charm and power of song so many stories are told.

337. **Hades' sentinel hound.** Cerberus, the many-headed dog, which guards the entrance to Hades.

338. **Or him who oars.** See note on 'the ferry-man', l. 235.

PAGE 13, 370. **Eumelus.** Euripides brings young children on the stage more frequently than any other Greek dramatist; thus the child Orestes is introduced in the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Molossus Andromache's child in the *Andromache*, while in the *Medea* the children are heard weeping behind the scenes.

394. **antiphonal dirge.** That is, a dirge in which the strophe and the antistrophe alternate, as in the Chorus which follows, to which no doubt it refers.

PAGE 14, 408. **raven-haired God.** Hades, the God of the Nether World.

415-6. **sevenfold strings—mountain-tortoise.** The lyre is said originally to have had only four strings, Terpander (B.C. 650) adding three more. The first lyre is fabled to have been made by Hermes out of a tortoise-shell. There is a vivid and beautiful account of this in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, 125 seqq.

417. **unaccompanied lays.** Epic as distinguished

from lyric poetry because Epic was not regularly accompanied by music.

418. *circling feast*. A reference to the Carneia, a great Spartan festival held in honour of Apollo at Amyclae and lasting nine days, the epithet 'circling' meaning 'when it comes round in its due season'.

PAGE 15, 430. *Light be the mould*. This was the customary wish with reference to the dead. So the poet Ovid says:—

Ossa quieta, precor, tuta requiescite in urna,
Et sit humus cineri non onerosa tuo.

(*Amores*, El. III. ix. 67-8.)

(Rest quietly, ye bones, I pray, in an undisturbed urn, and may the earth not be heavy on thy ashes.) Imitations of this are not uncommon with our own poets. So Pope, *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, 'The green turf lie lightly on thy breast'.

444. *Hercules*. Hercules is introduced at that period of his career when he was engaged in the twelve labours imposed on him by Eurystheus, king of Mycenae, in return for which he had been promised immortality. Seven of those labours he had accomplished, and he was now on his way to achieve the eighth, which was to bring back to Mycenae the mares of Diomedes, king of the Bistones in Thrace, savage animals fed on human flesh. He was already acquainted with Admetus, who had been more than once his guest in Argos.

452. *Bistonian soil*. The Bistones were a Thracian people, and so Bistonian came to be used as synonymous with Thracian.

PAGE 16, 458. *Tiryns' lord*. Tiryns was one of the most ancient of the Greek cities, and lay a short distance south-east of Argos.

465. *Ares*. The war-god, the Latin Mars.

469. *Lycaon—Cycnus*. Euripides appears to have confounded Lycaon, a son of Peleus, king of Pylos,

whom Hercules did slay, with Lycaon, a real or imaginary son of Ares, of whom there is no other record than the passage in the text. There were two men of the name of Cynus, both sons of Ares, whom Hercules slew.

472. **Alcmena's valiant son.** Alcmena was the mother of Hercules.

476. **scion of Perseus.** Perseus was Hercules' grandfather, Alcmena being the daughter of Electryon, the son of Perseus.

480. **attend a burial.** The object of Admetus in this scene is not to let Hercules know that Alcestis is dead, otherwise he would not have remained in the house as a guest. Admetus' regard for the rites of hospitality is the central point in the play, the virtue for which he was rewarded by the restoration of Alcestis.

PAGE 18, 535 seqq. **Dwelling-place, &c.** This very beautiful stasimon is introduced to celebrate and emphasize the noble regard felt by Admetus for the sacredness of the duty of hospitality.

543. **Othrys' forest.** Othrys was a lofty chain of mountains, shutting in the plain of Thessaly from the south, and abounded in forests; it is now called Gura.

PAGE 19, 548. **Boebe's marge.** Boebe was a town of Magnesia in Thessaly, on the eastern side of the lake, now called Karla, to which it gave its name.

551. **Molossian clime.** The Molossi were one of the three chief tribes who originally occupied Epirus and afterwards became its rulers; so that the Molossian clime is synonymous with Epirus.

552. **Pelion—Aegean.** Pelion is the famous mountain extending along the coast of Magnesia in Thessaly.

567. **I come in pity.** This mutually degrading scene between Admetus and Pheres must have appeared as indecent to an ancient Greek as it is to us: possibly it is to be accounted for by the reason suggested in the General Introduction. Paley dryly remarks that 'Admetus

is at least consistent in holding even a parent secondary to himself'.

PAGE 23, 684. **Acastus.** The brother of Alcestis ; he was one of the Argonauts.

PAGE 25, 742. **Cyprian Goddess.** Aphrodite or Venus. She is said after her birth to have proceeded first to Cythera and then to Cyprus, where one of her chief temples was situated.

751. **Mortal we are, &c.** A sentiment peculiarly characteristic of the ancient Greeks, and appearing in innumerable forms over and over again.

PAGE 26, 772. **Can this be true!** This sudden change of Hercules from a boisterous reveller into a serious hero, when he realizes the position of Admetus, is very fine and impressive.

777. **hair close shorn.** A sign of mourning.

786. **Larissa.** There were two towns of this name in Thessaly ; one the capital of the district Pelasgiotis, on the south bank of the river Peneius, the other in the district of Phthiotis and what is now known as the valley of Gardhike ; but it is the first which is probably meant.

790. **Tirynthian Alcmena.** So called because she was the wife of Amphitryon, king of Tiryns.

PAGE 29, 867. **Pelion's forest.** Mount Pelion overlooked Iolcos, which was Alcestis' home before she was married ; it was famous for its pine-trees.

PAGE 30, 913. **I have searched.** The point of this stasimon is the power of necessity, which on earth is omnipotent. Admetus then must submit to it, and solace himself with the immortal glory which his wife by her self-sacrifice has won.

PAGE 31, 936. **Bless us.** It was commonly believed by the Greeks that the spirits of the dead could confer blessings on the living.

PAGE 32, 939. **In dealing with a friend.** Hercules

has returned, having wrestled with Death and torn Alcestis from him. He now presents himself to Admetus leading a woman closely veiled. He says that he has won her as a prize in a contest and asks permission to leave her with Admetus till he returns from Thrace. The rest of the scene speaks for itself. It resembles somewhat closely the restitution of Hermione to Leontes in the *Winter's Tale*, Act v. Sc. 3.

PAGE 35, 1063. **no God's envy.** It was supposed by the ancients that great prosperity excited the jealousy of the gods and led to the possessor's ruin.

PAGE 36, 1071. **It is not lawful.** Two reasons have been assigned for the silence of Alcestis, one that she was necessarily represented by a mute, as the actor who played her part was also playing the part of Hercules and therefore could not personify her; the other and more probable reason is connected with Greek religious ceremonies. Alcestis, having died, had been consecrated to the infernal powers and was thus under a ban, and polluted. It was not lawful for one under pollution to speak till after purification, and for that purification she must wait. A modern reader might see in it a symbol of what Tennyson expresses in *In Memoriam*, xxxi, where Mary is represented as asking Lazarus :—

‘Where wert thou, brother, those four days?’

There lives no record of reply;

namely that the secret of what succeeds death is not to be known or divulged to living man. Poetry is full of these symbolic incidents.

1087–91. **The countless chances, &c.** The Greek plays have studiedly commonplace endings, and so conventional are these lines that with a slight change in one they form the conclusion of no less than five of Euripides' plays.



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